

Jensen Car Club of Switzerland



Continuing with our series on post-war classics and those who own and love them

"THE OPPOSITION MUST have thought I looked fairly dangerous," reflected Peter Adams, present owner of the only Jensen Interceptor to have passed from Jensen Motors Ltd. to Jensen Parts and Service when the company was put into the hands of the Receiver in May 1976.

"I had always admired the Interceptor," he continued. "However, just when I could afford to buy one the company crashed. But I was extremely lucky. I had taken my XK 150 to a concours event at Biggin Hill in Kent, where I found myself parked opposite a group of Jensen C-V8s. Their owners obviously felt my Jaguar presented sufficient competition to warrant a closer look and we got talking I mentioned

so the C-V8 was born. Fitted with the Chrysler 5.9 litre engine developing 305 bhp at 4,800 rpm, the C-V8 was launched in late 1962. *Autocar* was enthusiastic, and said "To sum up the Jensen C-V8 in one brief sentence — here, indeed, is a car that more than fulfils great expectations."

Indeed, all the ingredients seemed to be there: 0-60 mph in 8.4 secs.; a top speed of 133 mph, and a very stable ride. Only its outward appearance remained a point for debate. Once described as a good design cleverly disguised as the ugliest car in the world, its distinctive glass-fibre bodyshell was clearly a matter of personal taste, and in the event was to last a mere four years.

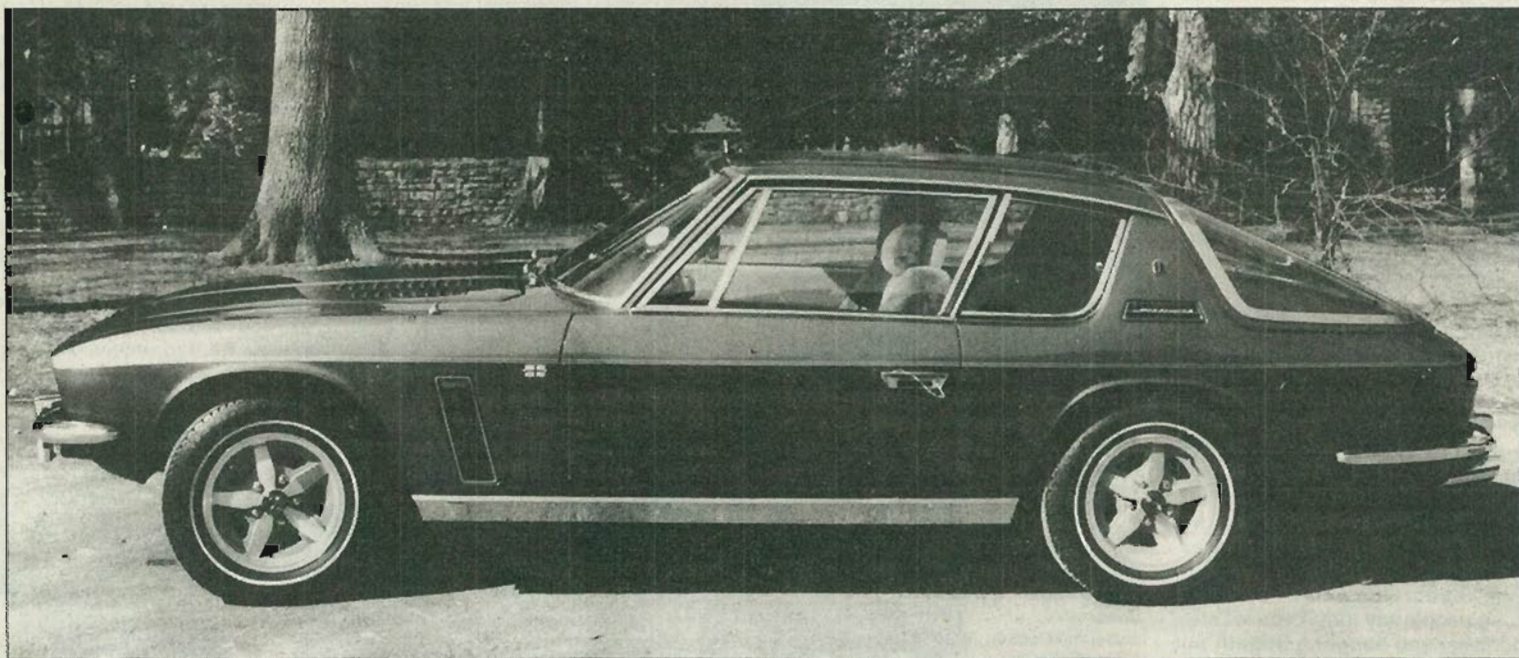
Jensen's Chief Engineer, Kevin Beattie, was anxious that the bulbous C-V8 body should be replaced by a more graceful, Italian design. The result was a Superleggera-constructed body by Touring to Vignale design, of ideal proportions and dateless elegance. The steel body was welded to a tubular framework which, in turn, was attached to a chassis fabricated from sheet and welded into box sections, forming a very rigid structure.

The new car was called the Interceptor, and Beattie was proven entirely right in his decision to re-body the C-V8. *Autocar*, for instance, found that during their test the Interceptor was "an eye-catcher everywhere and its looks a clever combination of practicalities and an efficient shape."

The Interceptor was fitted with the Chrysler 6.276 c.c. engine, which had been introduced into the C-V8 in 1965. This power unit

# Engaging Interceptor

*A car that will still turn heads, Mike Taylor looks at the elegant Jensen Interceptor*



that I had always wanted an Interceptor, and the next thing I knew, I was flying up to the Midlands to buy a Jensen."

The car which Peter was subsequently to buy was an Interceptor Mk III. Built in late 1972, the car had been used by Jensen's Managing Director, Kjell Qvale, before being taken as a work's demonstration model and road test vehicle.

"My lasting impression of the test run," recalled Peter Adams, "is of riding down the motorway at 120 mph in almost complete silence, while the Jensen Sales Director explained the car to me. When we arrived back at the factory, my only comment was that the tyres seemed a little thin. Immediately, they agreed to fit new tyres together with a set of replacement alloy wheels. The price was £5,500, which I felt represented very good value, so I bought it, arranging to collect the car when the work had been completed."

By the end of the 1950s, Jensen's 541 series, which were powered by the 4 litre BMC engine coupled to a manual gearbox, were long overdue for re-engineering. The trend towards automatic transmissions in this category of car induced Jensen into investigating the range of large American V8 power units, and in particular, the Chrysler engine with its Torqueflite automatic gearbox. Chrysler were happy to supply Jensen with engines, and

developed 325 bhp at 4,600 rpm and was capable of propelling the car from 0 - 60 mph in 6.7 secs. Maximum speed remained unaltered at 133 mph. The only adverse comments of the Interceptor concerned the heating and ventilation.

In 1969, the Mk II Interceptor was introduced. Modifications had been made to the engine (better torque and clean air combustion package); front suspension (ball-jointed wishbones and telescopic dampers); refinements to the gearbox (cushioned clutch to reduce snatch); and a revised rear-axle ratio (to suit new radial-ply tyres). However, it was still the heating and ventilation which let the car down.

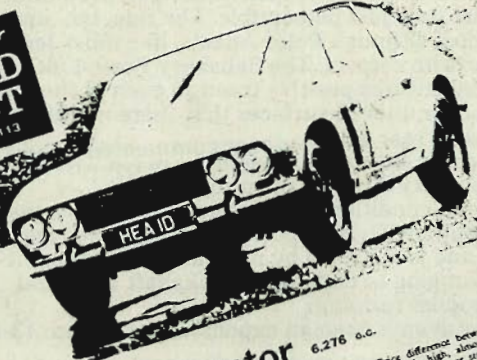
In 1971, the Interceptor Mk III was introduced. At last, Jensen had heeded the criticisms concerning poor ventilation and fitted air-conditioning and a redesigned facia. This successfully overcame the problem of engine-heat entering the cockpit in hot weather. Unfortunately, *Autocar* found that the system lacked sufficient control. The engine, which had been enlarged mainly to overcome the restricting effects of the exhaust emission equipment, was now 7,212 c.c. and developed 280 bhp (net) at 4,800 rpm.

Of his Interceptor Mk III, Peter Adams continued, "After buying the car I ran it as a business vehicle for approximately five months,





car  
ROAD  
TEST  
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# Jensen Interceptor 6.276 c.c.

**AT A GLANCE:** New Italian body for Jensen C-18 is sleek. Top speed 145 m.p.h. but acceleration powerful. Handling superb. Steering, smooth and light. American engine with well-matched automatic transmission. More comfortable and road-holding well balanced. Very satisfying interior. Very satisfying high-performance touring car with practical luggage.

It was entirely logical for Jensen to rationalize their production programme into just two almost identical looking models. The bulk of the C-18 was never very pretty and their kind of driving is now not for introduced at the very least. The new Interceptor would have taken 1964 Motor Show would have taken the variable production capacity and with the same interest in four-wheel drive for just one body with its most ideas and graceful lines to come from Italy for some time. Superlative construction by Touring to replace parts is used and although the first few cars have been built in Killarney, the main production is installed in the West Bromwich plant.

In order to keep costs low the optional (if that word can be applied to such a car) two-wheel-drive Jensen is identical with the FF (front-wheel-drive) except for all cars (except those of the greater gear for the front-wheel-drive take-off). The front-wheel-drive is a 197 cc. four-cylinder engine and a double ventilation grille just behind the front wheels each side. The FF also has a stainless steel roof.

Price difference between the two versions is high, almost £600, but this includes power steering and, of course, Dunlop Maxaret anti-lock brakes. This too concerns the two-wheel-drive Interceptor only, but we hope to add a supplementary version on the FF in the near future.

The Interceptor is a direct replacement for the C-18 and in its mechanical specification is much the same. There is a massive steel chassis fabricated from three steel welded into one section, but inside up front are composite body panels, an aluminium body and a tubular glass fibre and stainless steel chassis body. The main bulk of the chassis is made of steel, but the front part is made of aluminium. The result is tremendous strength and stiffness at the expense of a 10 per cent increase in weight, the Interceptor being nearly 3500 lb heavier than the C-18.

Such an increase, fortunately, is not much of a problem, as the 6.276 cc. Chrysler V8 engine develops more than enough horsepower to give dynamic performance with a safety factor of an understatement. The Touquet automatic transmission is standard and really can't be faulted at all, for those who

Above: From the 1967 Autotest of the Interceptor, featuring the Italian-designed steel bodywork  
Below left: Well-equipped dashboard of Interceptor Mk II  
Below right: Earlier Interceptors were fitted with this 6,276 c.c. engine which produced 325 bhp  
Bottom left. Interceptor III in convertible guise  
Bottom right: Snug rear seats provide excellent sideways location. Note neat hood cover

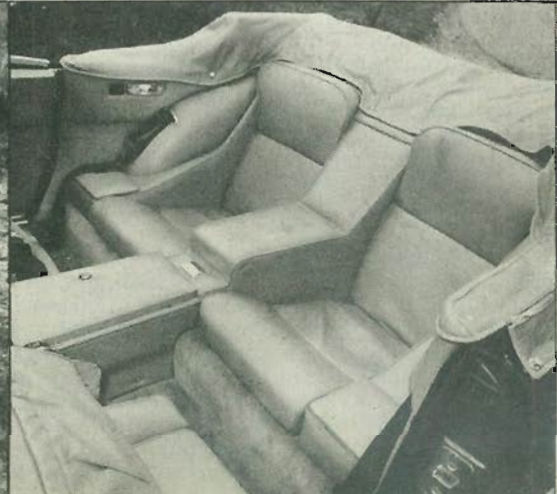
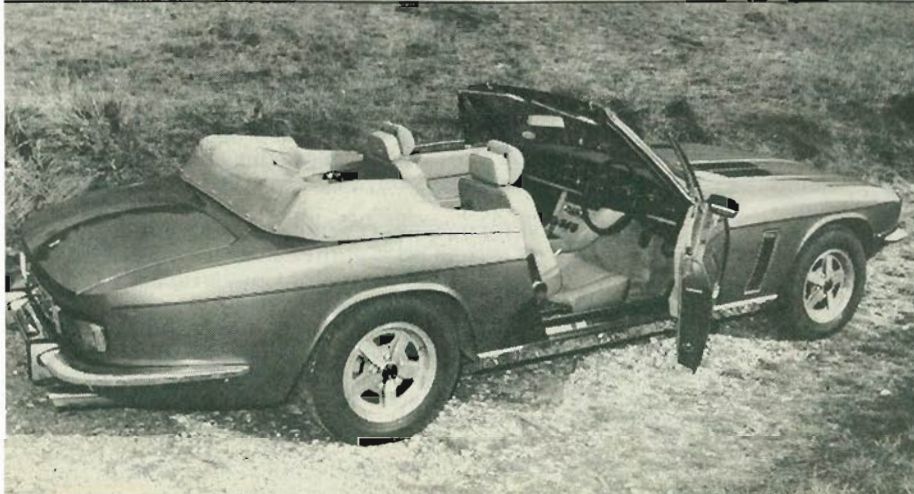
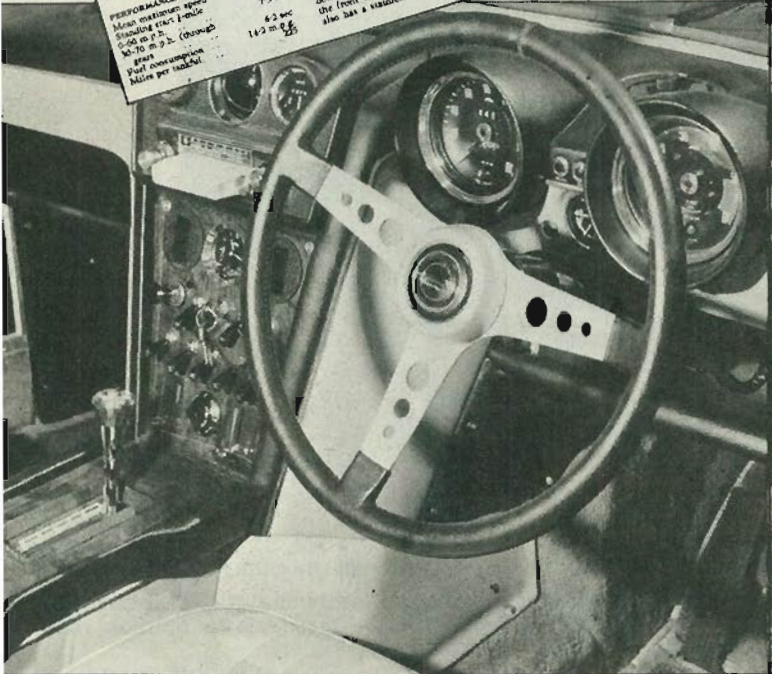
MANUFACTURER  
Jensen Motors Ltd., West Bromwich, Staffordshire.

Price	£3400	to 116
Basic	£290	to 116
Deliverance Tax	£512	to 116
Total (in G.B.)		

PERFORMANCE SUMMARY

133 hp D.A.	137 hp
142 hp	145 hp
145 hp	145 hp

Mean maximum speed  
0-60 m.p.h. in 10.5 sec.  
0-70 m.p.h. in 10.5 sec.  
Fuel consumption  
Miles per gallon





covering some 5,000 miles. During that time I had no mechanical failures at all, however, I began to find that the two doors and the limited rear seat space were considerable disadvantages when I wanted to carry business colleagues."

Surprisingly, the rear seat accommodation of the Interceptor, while lavishly upholstered, is restricted, and *Autocar* commented that the front seats had to be moved forward "noticeably" when carrying adults in the back.

"The first thing to give trouble was the thermostatically controlled cooling fans, which caused the car to overheat in traffic, and a bad blow in the exhaust system. I telephoned Jensen Parts and Service, and they told me to put the car on a trailer and send it directly to them at West Bromwich. Three days later, I flew up to Birmingham, where I was met by a courtesy car and driven to the factory. On my arrival, I was told that the car was not quite finished, as they had yet to give it a wash, but was invited to have lunch with the Managing Director in the meantime. I was extremely impressed by their service. Not long after, I decided to use the car for concours shows only, and took the car back to Jensen for a routine maintenance, where the work and attention was of the same high standard."

Rates of extremely high mileages with American V8 engines are legion. Spares, servicing, and maintenance, on the Chrysler engine and transmission pose few problems as the power units fitted to all Interceptors are off-the-shelf items. Additionally, body panels and those parts special to Jensen are still available.

The Chrysler Torqueflite automatic transmission, under most conditions, behaves with impeccable taste. Changes, even under fierce acceleration, are only just perceptible. The ride, too, under most conditions is good, although Peter Adams, like most Jensen owners, treats his car with respect. The Salisbury Powr-Lok limited-slip differential ensures positive traction even in the wet. It is only when driving over uneven surfaces that there is a hint of instability from the solid rear axle. *Autocar* commented on the limits at which the Jensen Interceptor begins to "becan unavy," that only an idiot would try it on the open road.

Under normal driving conditions, the Interceptor's performance is effortless. This smooth delivery of power is a celebrated feature of all American V8s, and is achieved by mechanical refinement – excellent vibration damping to eliminate crankshaft whip and hydraulic tappets for quiet running.

The Interceptor has always been an expensive car to run: 13-15

Left: Later Interceptors have 7,212 c.c. engines, producing only 280 bhp because of emission control demands

Colour page opposite: Peter Adams' 1972 prizewinning Interceptor Mk III



While Jensen had been coachbuilders since 1875, it is probable that, before 1966, and the introduction of the Interceptor, little money had been made directly as a result of Jensen's own models. The company relied heavily on sub-contract agreements with Volvo, Rootes and BMC for its financial stability. It came, therefore, as a devastating blow when the latter two withdrew their support in 1967. Norcross, the holding company resigned their interests and Jensen found themselves in the hands of Brandt's the merchant bankers. In 1970, Kjell Qvale, an American, bought the controlling interest in Jensen, and had great plans for the Company's future. During 1971, 1972 and 1973 Jensen had made a profit. The trouble really began in 1974. Firstly, with the Jensen Healey, which got off to a bad start through teething troubles on the engine, and as a result of the oil crisis. With a financial straightjacket growing tighter as charges on investments spiralled, and dealers cut back on orders, Jensen's future looked grim and Qvale's investment shakey. There was no way the Company could proceed under such conditions, and on 21 May, 1976 Jensens built their last car.

Determined that Jensen had a future, despite its financial problems, a consortium called Britcar Holdings purchased Jensen from the Receiver, splitting the Company to form two separate and independent units. The first, Jensen Special Products, responsible for specialised engineering work most suited to the Jensen engineers still employed. The second, Jensen Parts and Service, responsible for the servicing and maintaining of Jensen cars, and the production of spare parts for many of the Jensen models. However, unable to continue financially buoyant on this work alone, in 1978 Jensen Parts and Service became the headquarters for Subaru UK.

mpg the norm throughout the changes in engine capacity, giving a range of some 300 or so miles. Indeed, the fuel tank capacity was increased from 16 to 20 gallons on the Mk III, perhaps suggesting an admission on the part of Jensen of the car's restricted range.

It is a point in Jensen's favour that the majority of Interceptors today are in such good condition. In Peter Adams' opinion, rust does not seem to be an Interceptor problem.

"If someone was looking for a secondhand Interceptor," he says, "I would advise them to check the electrics. That, and the air conditioning (only on Mk III cars) seem to be the weak spots."

Perhaps partly due to a general acceptance of the price of petrol, and partly due to the Interceptor becoming increasingly popular as a "classic," prices are gradually increasing. Assuming the car to be in good condition, an early Interceptor will probably sell for £2,000-£2,500, whereas a later model in pristine condition (such as Peter Adams' Mk III) will probably fetch between £6,000 and £7,000.

Since using his car for concours events, Peter Adams has done well. In 1977, he took second prize at the Jensen Owners' Club Concours, being beaten by an Interceptor Convertible. In 1978, at the Brighton and Hove Concours, where Jensens finished 1st, 2nd and 3rd, he took third place. However, later in the year at Woburn, he was awarded the Jensen Owners' Club Rose Bowl, the highest accolade, and the Interceptor Trophy. After winning the coveted Rose Bowl Award, Peter received a letter from Bob Edmiston, managing director of Subaru UK, congratulating him on his success.

"It only goes to further illustrate how much interest the Company still has in Jensen," said Peter Adams. □